

A Short History Of Fawley Temple:

Some Stories From 'The Fawley Temple Booklet' Compiled By Connor April 2016

Fawley temple was originally commissioned in 1769 by Sambrooke Freeman, then living at Fawley Court. Its original structure consisted of two storeys, the main Etruscan room situated on the first floor with the basement below incorporating three arched windows on the south side.

Sambroke came from a family whose main interest was the study and appreciation of architecture. His great uncle Colonel William Freeman engaged Sir Christopher Wren in 1684 to design Fawley Court. Colonel Freeman died heirless in 1707 leaving Fawley Court to his nephew John Cook, who assumed the name of Freeman (Sambrooke Freeman was his son). It was John Freeman's interest in architecture which resulted in two prominent garden buildings being built at Fawley Court - the Gothic Chapel, made of flint and knuckle bone and constructed in 1732, which was the first securely datable Gothic garden building in England and the neo-classic Mausoleum built in 1750 in a shady corner of the Church yard at Fawley. With his in-depth knowledge and interest in architecture it is of little surprise that Sambrooke commissioned the building of Fawley Temple to further the ambitious garden scheme, therefore including the Thames in to the landscape garden.

In 1884, major changes had to be carried out on the Temple by the new owner Edward Mackenzie, a Scottish banker who had bought Fawley Court in 1853. A rise in the river level meant the level of the surrounding ground of the Temple had to be raised by several feet. Unfortunately this meant a change of design to the south side (from three arched windows to one small oval window) and the east and the west sides which now included oval windows as well. At the same time a four roomed cottage was added to the north side and a large wooden balcony was placed on the south side with a double staircase down onto the grass. The colour of the building at this stage was white instead of the original Bath Stone.

After World War II, the Mackenzie family erected a new stone statue of a nymph under the cupola. And in 1954 an amusing story recorded the statue going missing. Whilst structural repairs were being made to the roof of the cupola, the statue was temporarily placed on the lawn beside the Temple. During the Regatta that year, it is believed that one of the Irish crews, who had been knocked out of racing, decided to go down the island one night in punts with the aim to bring the statue up to the other end of the course and placing it in the Judges' Box at the finish of the course as a big surprise for the stewards of the Regatta the following morning. Finding the statue much heavier than they expected, they accidentally dropped it in the river. It was only discovered some years later by workmen dredging the bank of the island and was delivered to Miss Mackenzie who was living at Fawley Court.

No certain date has been documented for the removal of the wooden balcony which was constructed at the end of the nineteenth century, but by 1989, when the building was refurbished, all that remained was a single cast iron ladder.